



THE OPENING STATEMENT

of those who are supposed to remain silent

Abolitionist greetings and happy summer!

In the last issue of The Opening Statement, we invited readers to write in with comments and stories from inside. We'll summarize the responses we received below, but first we wanted to say a few things about why we started doing this. As we've explained before, when we started TOS in 2017 the idea was to publish the writings of prisoners above all as a way to facilitate dialogue inside, outside, and across the prison walls. As our then-incarcerated comrade Lacino Hamilton wrote in "The Opening Statement for The Opening Statement" back in the very first issue, the newsletter aimed to provide "a framework to foster a broad and continuing dialogue among prisoners, their family and friends, abolitionists, social justice activists, and all interested parties in order to find more effective ways to challenge the practice of caging people for part or all of their lives, and to promote social justice through education and dialogue. The goal of The Opening Statement is to assist in developing the critical analytical tools necessary to understand the system of imprisonment, our socialization to it, and to develop a sense of agency and capacity to interrupt imprisonment patterns."

We've explained this before but will say it again for new subscribers and others who are seeing TOS for the first time. Between 2017 and 2020, we did what we'd set out to do, regularly publishing articles, opinion pieces, poetry, and other writing by prisoners, along with other relevant articles by folks on the outside. Occasionally they blocked an issue or article because they claimed that the specific language in a specific article was a "threat to security." But all of a sudden in the spring or summer of 2020, right around when the pandemic kicked off, MDOC mailrooms started to reject the newsletter for a new reason that we'd never seen before. They claimed that articles written by prisoners counted as "prisoner-to-prisoner communication," as if they were private letters sent from one prisoner to another, which are prohibited under the mail policy.

This is obviously bullshit. We know for a fact that MDOC doesn't block other newsletters or publications that feature prisoner writings. It's pretty clear that they are targeting The Opening Statement because they disagree with the content we publish (and prisoners write).

We've been trying to challenge MDOC's censorship in various ways, but what's important to say here is that, for the time being, we decided to start printing content from other sources in the newsletter rather than stop publishing entirely. But more recently, at the suggestion of an incarcerated comrade, we have started to include a roundup of information that comes to us from prisoners throughout MDOC. In this way, we can help circulate information and observations from folks on the inside without being censored. So a couple issues ago we started including specific questions in the introduction, and in the last issue we included a summary of the responses we'd received. We also included new questions based on some of the topics that had come up in the previous round of letters, and invited folks to send us their thoughts: "has programming, etc., started up again? What about visitation? Is it happening the same as before or have things changed? When was the last time you were able to see family members and/or loved ones? How did you feel about and cope with not being able to see them during the pandemic? Have you had to mourn for someone, and if so how did you approach it? Also, if there's something else you think we'd be interested in feel free to write in as well."

Unfortunately, the last issue included an article by a prisoner at an MDOC facility—an article that had already been printed in the San Francisco Bay View and, as far as we know, had been sent in without any problems!—and mailrooms blocked it at eight facilities: Cotton, Ionia, Gus Harrison, Parnall, Alger, Bellamy Creek, Baraga, and Chippewa. As a result, we didn't

Summer 2022 | Issue 15

receive as many responses as last time. So we don't have as much info to share, but in any case here's the roundup of the letters we did receive:

May 9: We got a letter from a comrade at Central Michigan CF, who told us that he'd received a "continuance" from the parole board because he hadn't been able to take a mandatory course, which is backed up due to the pandemic. "I've been forced to remain incarcerated beyond my parole date because MDOC failed to accommodate me according to the standard they've set. Programming is a big issue at Central Michigan Correctional Facility and many of us are being held past our release date because of inadequate programming." This is something we've heard from other comrades, including someone else at the same facility, so we want to follow up on this problem in future issues of TOS.

May 13: We got two letters from comrades at Saginaw on the same day. The first sent a detailed letter that started out by describing serious problems in the chow hall. He reports that the food director there, who used to work for Aramark and then was hired by MDOC after the Aramark contract was canceled, gets the lowest quality food and gives small portions. He also explains how the food budget works and the perverse incentives it creates: "MDOC sets up a budget for food each year. Taxpayers pay to feed us. However, the food director (and maybe the stewards) do their best to 'save money' on our food. If they do, they get a bonus!" He also describes how the menu changed with the pandemic, and now two days a week they're served four slices of bread and some watery peanut butter and jelly that's only enough to cover 1/5 of a slice. This comrade also describes the difficulty of accessing certain hobbycraft items, like popsicle sticks, glue, and oil-based colored pencils, which are subject to quantity limits and restrictions.

The second comrade at Saginaw wrote in response to our questions. First of all, programming and visitation are back to full operation at the facility, with visitation allowed for 2 hours with 4 visitors per visit at the facility. Each housing unit does programming and visitation separate from the others. Family members have to schedule visits online in advance (through GTL) and say how many visitors there will be. The only change to visitation since before the pandemic is that now visitors have to do a rapid Covid-19 test beforehand, and prisoners also have to do a Covid-19 test at health care the day before the visit. This comrade goes on to say that his brother was able to visit and it "was like breathing new life (spirit) into my dying soul being confined here in the belly of the beast!" One of the questions we asked was about mourning, and in response this comrade writes: "I've suffered the greatest loss a child can endure—and that's the passing of my beloved dear mother... due to Covid-19. [Mourning is] a process. I've come to understand I'll never completely heal from her loss, but I must keep her precious memories alive inside of me, and keep making motion!"

June 13: A comrade at Central Michigan has been following the short-staffing at MDOC facilities and gave us an update in a letter. He writes that there are 70-90 unfilled positions currently at his facility, and he's hearing that there are 120 unfilled positions out of a total of 226 budgeted at Egeler. The rumor is that they will be closing Egeler down except for one unit, which will serve as intake for new prisoners. This comrade also updated the letter two days later (June 15) to add another

piece of evidence, confirming that 160 prisoners from Egeler had been transferred to Central Michigan, where they would supposedly be quarantined for 10 days. But the staff who processed them didn't wear masks (as usual) and they're the same staff who work in the other units as well. "So no quarantine at all," he writes. "This may generate another outbreak, like the Newberry CF ride-in did at the end of October 2021." (In that case, a group of prisoners were similarly transferred from Newberry, at the time a Covid-19 hotspot, to Central Michigan, causing an outbreak.)

Apparently, 4 of the 8 units at Carson City (Level 1) and 4 of the 8 units at Gus Harrison (Level 1) are closed. There is now only 1 unit of 140 men at Marquette (Level 1). A friend who was just transferred to Central Michigan from Gus Harrison told him that it seems like they are going to shut down the Level 1 units there. It's not clear what would happen with the other units. But the comrade adds that the license plate factory is at that facility, and it would have to be moved if that facility were to close. There is also a surplus of Level 2 beds in the system. The comrade thinks there's a possibility that Michigan Reformatory (which currently holds just 400 prisoners) and Muskegon could be closed, since they're both Level 2. We want to keep tracking these issues of short staffing and units being closed, so we invite you to let us know how things look where you are.

June 17: We got a letter from a comrade at Macomb who wrote to us looking back on the Covid-19 pandemic and describing how bad things have been at that facility. He echoes the comments of other prisoners who've told us that at the beginning of the pandemic it was the prison staff who brought the virus into the facility, cheating on temperature checks, not doing tests, and coming to work sick. This comrade includes a list of all the prisoners who died from Covid-19 at Macomb: Perry-El, Garrison-El, Robison-Bey, Williams-Bey, Notar-X, and Henry-X. He continues: "And then there were ones that went to the hospital and never came back." There is also a description of the problem of false positive tests, which led to healthy prisoners being placed in the Covid-unit and getting infected as a result. (This is a story that MAPS has also documented in our zine *The Pandemic Inside*.)

June 17: We received a letter from a comrade at Thumb, with a thoughtful reflection on the way the pandemic has turned people into numbers. "Over two years of constant numbers. . . . You cannot turn on the news and not be given numbers. The pandemic has reduced humanity to numbers." This is a problem we've tried to address in our writing about the pandemic in MDOC, but as you can imagine it's hard to do from the outside. For example, as we discussed in the last issue, MDOC only makes public the total number of prisoners who have gotten Covid-19 and died from Covid-19 on their website. (For what it's worth, the most recent update on the MDOC website is that there have been 33,372 total positive cases and 159 deaths of prisoners since the start of the pandemic.) They don't tell you when anything happened, so you can't track infections and deaths over time. And they definitely don't tell you who died, or how. It's only in updates like the one above, which give the names of prisoners who were infected and died, or tell stories about them, that we are able to see something that goes beyond the bare minimum that MDOC wants us to see.

Finally, since the last issue of the newsletter was blocked at Chippewa, we are republishing a description of some Events that happened there, and we'd be interested to hear more about the incident if you have information you'd like to share. On Tuesday, February 8 at 11:45 am, a unit at Chippewa Correctional was at lunch in another unit when two officers began traveling cube to cube taking prisoner property and food and throwing it into a white cart. When prisoners returned to find their belongings taken, they immediately demanded a sergeant be called to the unit, but the officers only responded by threatening to send prisoners to the hole. One officer then left the unit to take the cart of belongings to the dumpster.

During this time, 35-40 prisoners stood together in silence at the center of the unit and officers called for backup. A sergeant and several other officers arrived shortly and a brief standoff was broken by prisoners beginning to vent complaints about the breach or prisoner property protocol as well as mounting frustration about continual racist verbal abuse by the unit officers.

At this point officers gave a dispersal order, however, around 25 prisoners remained until a Deputy Warden appeared on the unit and made promises to resolve the issues alongside block representatives, at which point all prisoners peacefully dispersed to their cubes.

The following day, however, a number of inmates were called into the control center, issued "incite to riot" tickets for "failing to disperse". The reprimanded prisoners had their security

levels increased, were put into administrative segregation, then transferred to other facilities.

We plan to keep doing roundups like this one in future issues of TOS, so we invite you to send us updates from your facility. Here are some of the things we're interested in writing about in the next issue: Has educational and/or vocational programming resumed at the facility you're held at? Are you eligible for parole but your programming isn't available? What delays have you faced in meeting parole eligibility? You've probably heard about the non-English language dictionary ban that was recently amended, but we're still interested in whether language learning in any capacity is available/allowed? Is your facility short-staffed, and if so how many positions are unfilled? What effects have you noticed as a result of short-staffing (e.g. yard time, units being closed down, etc.)? Has the facility you're held in been put on lockdown recently due to the pandemic or other reasons? If so, for how long and how was it justified? How does this compare to previous years (2020, 2021, etc.)? We're also interested in work and working conditions in MDOC. Do you work and if so what kind of work do you do and what's it like? How much are you paid? And what about inflation? Have you seen prices go up in commissary and if so how much? And again, if there's anything else you want to share with us, feel free to send us a letter.

In solidarity,

MAPS

2022 Alternative Awards for "Excellence" in MDOC

After two years of hiatus due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the MDOC held an "employee appreciation" banquet on May 7, 2022. With engraved crystal trophies and a chocolate fondue fountain, everyone from COs to prisoncrats and pencil-pushers from Lansing gathered in a dingy ballroom to congratulate each other on a job well done, through two years of pandemic and suppressing prisoner organizing. Some dorks from the MDOC Honor Guard did some marching and American flag-holding – a show of awkward, settler colonial-imperialist pageantry if we ever saw one. They handed out awards for "professional excellence," "agent of the year," and "officer of the year." It's funny to see the MDOC try to make their employees happy with awards and a dinner when record staff shortages, and CO discontent with both Heidi Washington and the MDOC's vaccination requirements, have made their way to outside press. (A July 26 article published in Bridge Michigan indicates that there are currently 900 unfilled positions out of a total of 5100 in MDOC, which means that more than 1 in 6 positions are vacant.) It's also sick to imagine these pigs congratulating each other on their roles in brutal repression, torture, and captivity.

For this issue of The Opening Statement, MAPS decided to give out some of our own awards to the MDOC. Though we would never waste what little money we have on crystal trophies, we can still give out some MDOC Superlatives and recognize some of the "achievements" from this sick, crumbling, fascist institution.



Most Likely to Stall a PREA Grievance: Macomb Correctional Facility! In recognition of your ongoing commitment to perpetuating gendered and sexual violence against prisoners. Special shout out to Officers Brown and Turner.

Most Dangerous and Abusive Prison: Chippewa Correctional Facility (URF)! You really earned the nickname “U R Fucked,” with your commitment to nepotism, hushing up guard abuse, and refusing to clean up the black mold.

Most Repressive Prison: All of them! Honorable mention: Women’s Huron Valley, for mail repression of radical literature, forcing prisoners to take Ivermectin for scabies, sexual assault, and putting someone in solitary for dancing to music on the yard (08/09/2021). We also remember Janika Edmond, Natasha Roark, and other unknown women who have died at WHV of suicide and COVID.

Least Likely to Repeal Truth in Sentencing: Gretchen Whitmer! Your paltry pardons in 2020 have not been forgotten. Girl Power means refusing compassionate release, ignoring hundreds of pleas from folks inside and their loved ones for freedom, right?

Girlboss of the Year: Heidi Washington! You put the “gatekeep” in “girlboss, gaslight, gatekeep!” You go, girlfriend!

Most Annoying, Pudding-Faced, Racist Asshat: Chris Gautz! Your cover for the MDOC’s abysmal COVID response is the least of your crimes. You referred to Spanish and Swahili as “obscure” languages in an attempt to minimize the MDOC’s racist and discriminatory “English-only” policy. Also, you’re ugly.

Your move, MDOC. We eagerly await your acceptance speeches.

Submit your own MDOC superlatives in a reply to us! We’ll publish them in the next issue!

The City in the Forest: Reinventing Resistance for an Age of Climate Crisis and Police Militarization| *Anonymous* | Crimethinc. | 04-11-22

Since April 2021, police abolitionists and environmentalists have been engaged in a furious struggle to prevent the destruction of a precious stretch of forest in Atlanta, Georgia, where the government aims to build a police training compound and facilitate the construction of a giant soundstage for the film industry. In the following analysis, participants in the movement chronicle a year of action, tracing the movement’s victories and setbacks and exploring the strategies that inform it. This campaign represents a crucial effort to chart new paths forward in the wake of the George Floyd Rebellion, linking the defense of the land that sustains us with the struggle against police.

“When a tree is growing, it’s tender and pliant. But when it’s dry and hard, it dies. Hardness and strength are death’s companions. Pliancy and weakness are expressions of the freshness of being. Because what has hardened will never win.”

-Stalker, Andrei Tarkovsky

Defending the Forest in the City

Atlanta is a city in a forest, with the most tree coverage of any urban center in America. The South River Forest constitutes the largest continuous section of this forest; it functions as the “lungs” of the city, trapping carbon emissions and runoff in its marshy lands and dense tree canopy. The South River Forest connects other forested areas across the entire southern half of the city and up the east side into Decatur. It is not uncommon to see deer running or playing in the woods—a breathtaking experience, especially in a city. Away from surveillance cameras and strip malls, teenagers go on dates, enthusiasts ride mountain bikes, and elderly people walk their dogs.

This is where the governments of Atlanta and Dekalb County and the Atlanta Police Foundation are attempting to build a police training compound. Next door, in Intrenchment

Creek Park, a scandalous land-swap deal will give public lands to Blackhall Studios, who hopes to expand their nearby soundstage complex into the biggest such facility on earth. This forest forms an essential link in the urban wildlife corridor, which these developments will destroy. If the developments go forward, the entire metropolitan area, which is currently insulated from the worst consequences of ongoing climate collapse, will experience worse floods, higher temperatures, and smog-filled afternoons just as the world enters a century of climate crises and ecological collapse.

The area where the Police Foundation hopes to build their training compound is also the site of the Old Atlanta Prison Farm. In the 19th century, slaves worked this land after it was taken from the Muscogee (Creek) people, who call the area Weelaunee. During Reconstruction, the land briefly operated as a dairy works; afterwards, it was turned into a prison camp where prisoners were forced to till fields and rear animals in dehumanizing conditions. Some were even lynched. Paving this land over with new carceral infrastructure perpetuates a historical continuum of dispossession and abuse.

Opponents of these plans regard the police training facility—dubbed “Cop City”—and the Blackhall development as interrelated aspects of the same repressive restructuring of Atlanta. In short, **the Blackhall development will exacerbate economic disparities and ecological collapse, while Cop City will equip the police to preserve them.**

The movement opposing these developments, mobilizing around the watchwords Defend the Forest and Stop Cop City, has passed through several phases of experimentation, using a wide array of tactics and strategies to keep pace with the course of events. It represents an important effort to revitalize eco-defense and police abolition strategies in the wake of the George Floyd Rebellion.

The City in the Forest | Continued from Page 4

Background

To understand the movement, it's necessary to back up a bit.

The Atlanta Way

"Historians say The Atlanta Way has its roots in Black and white business leaders meeting behind closed doors to negotiate incremental advances in racial issues to avoid public protests and preserve the city's business-friendly image."

"In the 1960s, it helped the city overcome the turmoil of desegregation and become a national leader in the Civil Rights Movement. Atlanta emerged as the economic capital of the Southeast. That reputation has endured for decades, thanks to the many champions of The Atlanta Way in business and government."

—"The Atlanta Way is an Ideal Never Fully Realized," Atlanta Business Chronicle

The "Atlanta Way," as it is known locally, is a model of social management that goes back to the early 1960s. During the re-emergence of Black resistance movements in the Deep South after the Second World War, business leaders, landlords, government officials, and industrial magnates established a cross-caste alliance for the express purpose of forestalling racial justice movements in the city. They hoped that by increasing cooperation between the white corporate power structure and the Black business class, they could pre-empt the demands of the exploited Black masses without significantly altering the post-war capitalist economy, which brought unprecedented power to the ruling class in the United States following the destruction of European industry. Developed in the Jim Crow period and its immediate aftermath, the Atlanta Way subordinated public policy to the personal relationships and back-door dealings of the rich, a trend that continues to this day.

The basic structure of pre-emptive counterinsurgency reflected in the Atlanta Way strategy dictates that Black people hold political office and fill roles in administration, policing, and the justice industry. In return, those who hold these positions are expected to impose repressive policies, budget cuts, and mass privatization on the region's Black and poor majority. Many Georgia liberals believe that assuring progress on racial inequality means creating financial and business incentives for developers, universities, construction companies, industries, and real estate investors. Nepotistic patronage systems—similar to what is known as clientelism in some parts of the world—are supposed to foster a thriving Black middle class.

Yet Black residents of Atlanta are still overrepresented in the city's jails, unemployment statistics, food lines, and probation offices. All of the large public housing developments in the city have been closed down, all of the large shelters for the houseless have been shuttered, and historically Black neighborhoods face an unprecedented influx of non-Black tenants displaced from other cities and neighborhoods by the rising costs of living around the world.

The Atlanta Way connects our time to the Jim Crow era. Without it, Atlanta would not be a major destination for

profiteers and businessmen. By organizing city affairs around private agreements between politicians and capitalists, by coordinating investments and commerce according to the principles of privatization and corporate incentives, the architects of this system have smuggled Reaganite neoliberal policies into institutional leftism. In framing this as "anti-racist," political elites deprive poor people of a necessary tool for fighting against immiseration. Indeed, the Atlanta Way could make it appear that anti-racism is simply a creative way to package the plundering of resources by politicians and their colleagues in the business and non-profit sectors.

Today, Atlanta has become the most unequal city in the continental US, and the Atlanta Way is beginning to break apart. Direct resistance to police brutality and racism also has a long, militant, history here, and it is clear that the years ahead will create a hostile environment for the ruling cliques. This is the context in which we can anticipate a new wave of resistance to the Atlanta Way from above. International investors and increasingly white, wealthy enclaves have no long-term investment in the urban core; they use the city as a space for profiteering because of its low taxes and relatively affordable land. Resistance will also come from below: from renters, workers, students, prisoners, young people, and residents facing displacement and erasure. The discourses of the past century will no longer serve to reconcile these two camps. The city government and its vast non-profit hydra are trapped between two conflicting forces; they may be swept aside in increasingly desperate fighting between them.

The George Floyd Protests

The Obama era witnessed several large-scale autonomous movements, including Occupy Wall Street, the first wave of Black Lives Matter protests sparked by the revolt in Ferguson, and the struggle against the Dakota Access Pipeline.

The election of Donald Trump coincided with a far-right reaction propelled by memes, online misogynist forums, xenophobia, white nationalism, and anti-elitism. This in turn catalyzed a fierce anti-fascist movement. At the high points, it involved millions of ordinary people; but the front-line participants largely emerged from the same social strata as previous grassroots movements, all of which were de-emphasized in favor of building common cause with urban liberals and progressives against the extreme right.

The George Floyd uprising changed all of that. In a matter of weeks, tens of millions of people confronted the police, directly challenging the right of the state to determine what constitutes safety or to defend disparities in access to resources.

In the final days of May 2020, protests and riots spread from Minneapolis to the rest of the country, including Atlanta. For several weeks, thousands of people clashed with police and National Guardsmen near Centennial Olympic Park, constructing barricades, throwing back tear gas canisters, and breaking up the sidewalks into projectiles. On some occasions, large crowds smashed storefront windows, shined lasers at police helicopters, and threw fireworks at police. Every day, dozens of protests rocked the metropolitan area, with revolts also taking place in some suburbs.

The City in the Forest | Continued from Page 5

On June 12, 2020, two Atlanta police officers killed Rayshard Brooks, who had been sleeping in his car at a Wendy's. In the following days, determined crowds torched the restaurant. Clashes continued on and off for weeks at the nearby Zone 3 Precinct, then located at Cherokee and Atlanta Avenue in Grant Park, bringing tear gas and explosions to the residential streets almost nightly. Protesters also established a small occupation at the burned-out remains of the Wendy's.

Amid this unrest, the Attorney General brought murder charges against officer Garrett Rolfe for the killing. In response, hundreds of police officers initiated a citywide sickout, calling out of work and refusing to perform their normal duties. Many officers quit their jobs due to the stress of facing popular opposition and fear of legal consequences for their systematic use of force.

From the beginning of June to the end of 2020, more than 200 Atlanta police officers left their jobs, including the Chief of Police. Some state patrolmen resigned after protesters wrecked their headquarters on July 4, 2020. Some sheriff's deputies, public transit cops, and affiliated staff also sought new employment. The Georgia Bureau of Investigations has sent out mass recruitment emails to sociology students, suggesting that they too are desperate for more agents. The system faces a crisis of legitimacy and an impossible institutional dilemma as white business owners, landlords, business associations, and international real estate companies demand a crackdown.

This was the context in which the City of Atlanta, the Atlanta Police Foundation, and the office of former Atlanta Mayor Keisha Lance Bottoms developed the plan to build the Cop City. Bundling together cultural nationalism with calls for peace, Mayor Bottoms appealed for calm as her officers dragged students out of cars, beat protesters with batons, and shot tear gas into crowded streets.

The consequences of these events are still underestimated by commentators and activists alike. Some suffer induced amnesia about the revolt; others have moved on to simple commemoration; still others continue isolated but no doubt justified forms of subversive action. Meanwhile, forces in local and federal government, business associations, police departments, and armed militias have continuously worked to make sure a popular uprising does not reoccur.

In addition to passing laws and killing dissidents, this institutional reaction has focused on managing public perception. Industrial interests and private investment companies have conducted influence campaigns using local news outlets—40% of which are owned by Sinclair Broadcast Group, a right-wing organization with ties to former US President Donald Trump. Between Sinclair, Nexstar, Gray, Tegna, and Tribune, this coordinated reframing of events has damaged the way that many sectors of the television-viewing public perceive the revolt and its consequences.

In the wake of the uprising, a false narrative circulated to the effect that the police, demoralized and underfunded, could not control the “crime wave” sweeping the country. This narrative, orchestrated in response to the popular demand to “defund the police” advanced by some sections of the 2020 revolt, has shaped the imaginations of suburban whites, small business

owners, and many urban progressives. The “crime wave” framework implied that police departments around the country had in fact been defunded or had their powers curtailed and were consequently unable to assure social peace or free enterprise. In reality, the vast majority of police departments received an annual increase in their budgets, as they normally do. If anything, they accrued more power following the events of 2020, from the political center as well as the right—witness the accession of Eric Adams to mayor of New York City.

The Police Foundation enables corporations to funnel money to law enforcement. Behind every ribbon-cutting ceremony, a line of riot police.

“Institute for Social Justice”

The government of Atlanta has developed a few tentative solutions to the dilemmas they face. To follow through on their commitments to their backers, city politicians need to continue sacrificing public assets on the altar of the economy in order to attract more major investors to the region, especially the film industry and technology companies. To maintain control in a period of rapid displacement and rising cost of living, with chronic tension between the conservative state government and the liberal city administration, they need to funnel more resources towards law enforcement throughout the region. Finally, to appease the increasingly rebellious lower classes, they need to frame this process of restructuring and repression in the language of Black empowerment, social justice, and progressivism.

The bureaucrats are not in a good position to handle this. Decades of tax cuts and deregulation have created infrastructural failures and breakdowns of all kinds. Among other concerns, Atlanta lost the bid for a second Amazon headquarters because the public transit, one of the least-funded in the US, was not even operable when the corporate scouts came to visit. At the same time, it is precisely the low taxes and absence of regulation that attract capital to the state of Georgia, so cultivating a social-democratic governing strategy now may be impossible without creating a flight of wealth to other parts of the country. It seems that the current plan is to give over as many public contracts and resources to private developers as possible, to allow them to incur the costs of social disintegration and anger, to use the police to control the blowback, and to use images of Martin Luther King, Jr. to pre-empt meaningful resistance.

Thus, the plan to transform a wild space into a police training compound is dubbed the “Institute for Social Justice.” The plundering of public assets for the benefit of a movie company and real estate mogul is described as an opportunity to create “good jobs” for local Atlantans, not as a criminal expropriation of infrastructure. The clear-cut that Blackhall Studios plans to trade the city government in exchange for a section of the forest is to be renamed “Michelle Obama Park.”

The government plans to begin clearing the forest for construction in May or June of 2022. What follows is the story of the movement determined to stop this.

The City in the Forest | Continued from Page 6

Timeline of Events

For the sake of brevity, this timeline does not include lawsuits, injunctions, petitions to stop work, and the like.

Spring-Summer 2021: The City of Atlanta, in partnership with Blackhall Studios, approves the swap of DeKalb County public lands at Intrinishment Creek Park for a parcel of land currently owned by the movie studio. The land deal is conducted in a semi-secretive series of board meetings and hearings.

April-May 2021: Activists and local ecologists uncover a plan by the Atlanta Police Foundation to transform the land known as the Old Atlanta Prison Farm at Key Road and Fayetteville Road into a massive police training compound.

May 15, 2021: Over 200 people gather at Intrinishment Creek Park for an informational session about the development proposals.

May 17, 2021: According to an anonymous statement on Abolition Media Worldwide, seven machines left unguarded on the land parcel owned by Blackhall—chiefly tractors and excavators—are vandalized. Their windows are broken, their tires cut, and they are set on fire. The statement connects the sabotage to the destruction of the forest:

We don't need a soundstage for entertainment. Everything we need is already there. We don't need police training facilities. We demand an end to policing... Any further attempts at destroying the Atlanta Forest will be met with similar response. This forest was here long before us, and it will be here long after.

June 2021: Notices appear affixed in the forest notifying passersby that trees in the area have been “spiked,” with the consequence that cutting them could damage saws and possibly injure those utilizing them.

June 10, 2021: Three more excavators are burned on the parcel of land owned by Blackhall Studios. Neither action appears in local news media, although photographic evidence of the damage circulates on social media.

June 16, 2021: On the night that the Atlanta City Council is to vote on the construction ordinance for the “Cop City,” a handful of activists protest outside of the private residence of City Councilperson Joyce Shepherd, the sponsor of the ordinance.

June 23-26, 2021: The first week of action brings hundreds of people into the movement.

August 23, 2021: In Roseville, Minnesota, the windows of Corporation Service Company office are smashed. An anonymous online statement reads,

After smashing the office door and throwing cans of paint inside, a message was left sprayed across the front: HANDS OFF THE ATLANTA FOREST. Demands are being made for CSC to drop their client, Blackhall Studios. Blackhall Studios would like to level the South Atlanta Forest to build the country's largest soundstage and an airport, creating unprecedented levels of gentrification in the city.

Summer 2021: The Stop Cop City coalition and other left-wing groups join the movement. Grassroots activist organizations and networks create their own demonstrations, social media

Issue 15 | The Opening Statement | Page 7

pages, and meetings. Local independent media outlet Mainline Zine steps up coverage of the movement more or less from the perspective of these organizations.

September 2021: City Council meetings, held on Zoom because of coronavirus-related restrictions, are repeatedly flooded with hours of objections to the project. Votes on the ground-lease ordinance are repeatedly delayed because of these objections and demonstrations at the homes of Atlanta Chief Operations Officer Jon Keen and City Councilperson Natalyn Archibong.

October 7: Color of Change announces that Coca-Cola is stepping down from the Atlanta Police Foundation board.

October 18: A small group of rapid-responders disrupt the surveying and clearing of grounds at Old Atlanta Prison Farm. A surveillance tower is destroyed.

November 10-14: A wide range of cultural events, info-nights, bonfires, and meetings occur during a second week of action. This coincides with the establishment of an encampment in the forest; it lasts for six weeks.

November 12: A demonstration takes place at Reeves Young Headquarters. Intelligence gathering by activists indicates that Reeves Young Construction has been contracted to destroy the forest and build the Cop City development. About 30 people converge at the company headquarters in Sugar Hill, Georgia, holding banners and demanding that the company sever their contract with the Atlanta Police Foundation.

November 20: Two more bulldozers burn in the forest. According to an anonymous statement republished on the Unoffensive Animal website, anonymous forest defenders

...burnt two bulldozers in the south Atlanta forest. No Copy City, No Hollywood dystopia. Defend the Atlanta Forest.

This equipment was located on the land-swap parcel currently owned by Blackhall Studios, the planned future location of “Michelle Obama Park.”

November 27: A group of Muscogee (Creek) people return to their ancestral lands at the current site of Intrinishment Creek Park in the South River Forest, which, in Creek, is called Weelaunee. The Muscogee delegation calls on everyone to defend the land from the Cop City and Blackhall developments.

December 17: A dozen protesters march to the entrance gate of Blackhall Studios on Constitution Road and block the main entrance, chanting slogans. Shortly after, a large contingent of police raids the forest, evicting the protest camp established there.

December 20: According to an anonymously-written statement republished on the website Scenes from the Atlanta Forest, banners are hung in the backyard of the private residence of Dean Reeves, chairman of Reeves Young. Reportedly, Dean Reeves was among the board members present at the November 17 action and personally shoved and assaulted protesters.

January 9: Survival Resistance, a local environmentalist organization, begins a campaign against AT&T, which is funding the Cop City development, holding protests outside their offices.

The City in the Forest | Continued from Page 7

January 18: In order to begin “boring” the land, a process necessary for determining the construction supplies needed for laying foundation, Reeves Young and a representative of the Atlanta Police Foundation enter the woods near Key Road and use a bulldozer to knock down many trees. Construction is stopped when protesters demand that they leave. The bulldozer remains at the scene; it is subsequently vandalized, losing its windows.

January 19: Several people climb into tree houses in the forest near the previous day’s confrontation, announcing their intention to remain there in order to delay further destruction.

January 25-27: Long Engineering resumes surveying Old Atlanta Prison Farm, accompanied by the Atlanta Police Foundation, Atlanta police officers, and Dekalb County sheriffs.

January 28: 60 forest defenders march into South River Forest near the Old Atlanta Prison Farm to stop the boring and soil sample collection. Dekalb County Police attack the protesters, arresting four—the first arrests inside the forest in the context of the movement.

January 31: “Autonomous vandals” break windows and spray paint “stop cop city” on a Bank of America in the Twin Cities, Minnesota. According to an online statement, this occurs in solidarity with the protesters arrested on January 28.

March 1: According to another communiqué,

Five large Long Engineering trucks used to do survey work to help delineate destruction in the South Atlanta Forest were destroyed in solidarity with eco-defenders currently protecting the forest from being clear-cut to build cop city and more Hollywood infrastructure for Black Hall Studios.

March 19: Six machines owned by Reeves Young, including two large excavators and a bulldozer, are destroyed in Flowery Branch, Georgia. The online communiqué reads:

Unless your company chooses to pull out of the APF’s Cop City project of its own volition, we will undermine your profits so severely that you’ll have no choice but to drop the contract.

March 26: Wells Fargo and Bank of America ATMs are vandalized in City Center, Philadelphia. According to an online statement, both institutions were targeted because they fund the Atlanta Police Foundation.

Coming Out with a Bang

Movements usually take one of two common paths from inception to peak to decline.

The first possibility is gradual escalation. This is the model commonly embraced by activist organizations, labor unions, student groups, and the like. In this approach, movement organizers or cadres initiate meetings and protest actions designed to walk as many people as possible through the contradictions inherent in the reformist process, slowly introducing the participants to the need for additional methods.

When this strategy goes well, an experienced movement then initiates a sequence of broader and more militant efforts focused around particular demands or aims. In the austerity era, however, it is very difficult to compel the authorities to

grant demands; more frequently, police repression, charismatic careerists, and attrition all contribute to the slow deceleration of the struggle. In regions or companies that are experiencing substantial economic growth, movements are sometimes able to win their demands, but this generally comes at the expense of the mobilization itself, involving the co-optation of movement leaders, the criminalization of effective tactics, and the subsequent restructuring of resources and institutions—for example, in the form of automation or outsourcing.

Alternatively, it sometimes occurs that a movement erupts into the spotlight with a sudden concussive gesture that draws attention and power into a kind of vortex of refusals. Such struggles are often catalyzed by single issues or grievances that rapidly become paradigmatic of all social ills. Most of the mass revolts that have broken out since 2019 have followed this path, including the so-called October Revolution in Chile, the George Floyd uprising in the US, the revolt against Omar Bashir in Sudan, and the 2022 uprising in Kazakhstan. By escalating into a general clash with all forms of power, the protagonists of these struggles indict the entire social order, posing the question of revolution in practical terms. To date, however, most such uprisings have been crushed by police, swallowed by civil wars, or annihilated by geopolitical superpowers.

Thus far, the fight to defend the Atlanta forest does not fit either of these patterns. It may represent a different trajectory, suggesting a way forward for struggles after the tumultuous events of 2020.

First, Attack Their Strategy

In April 2021, when activists discovered these two proposals to destroy the South River Forest, they spread the news via word of mouth for several weeks about a large information sharing session at Intrinishment Creek Park. Around 200 people attended this initial event. The city government had yet to announce its plans publicly, so the opponents were able to craft the public narrative themselves, ensuring that the facts didn’t get lost in the shuffle. At the information session, multiple masked presenters contextualized the development within an overall schema of 1) racist and authoritarian backlash against the George Floyd protests, 2) pan-urban gentrification and displacement processes, and 3) climate collapse and the long-term future of the region.

With this event, event organizers denied the city government the opportunity to introduce the developments to the public with a distorted narrative—assuming they intended to publicize them at all. Attendees asked questions, shared perspectives, and committed themselves to sharing what they had learned with their communities while organizing grassroots, bureaucratic, and direct resistance. This established basis for a collective struggle that could utilize multiple strategies and tactics.

Within 48 hours, saboteurs destroyed seven unguarded excavators, tractors, and other pieces of heavy machinery. An anonymous statement appeared online detailing their motivations and methods and connecting the attacks to the struggle against colonialism, authoritarianism, and gender normativity. This catapulted the movement into its first phase of development. To date, no one has been arrested for these actions.

The City in the Forest | Continued from Page 8

Over the following weeks, meetings, posters, and fliers spread throughout left-wing networks, farmers' markets, and do-it-yourself subcultural spaces. Local ecologists and folk historians with long-term investment in the land organized tours and plant identification walks. A few candidates for City Council adopted the struggle as a component of their electoral campaigns.

In mid-June, saboteurs published another statement announcing that a number of trees had been "spiked" and three more excavators had been damaged. The sabotage occasioned no dismay among the opponents of the development. Rather, because it occurred so early in the movement, this kind of bold action became a part of its genetic material. While many people celebrated these actions, it remained to be seen whether the movement would develop a participatory strategy enabling more people to take action beyond sharing information or cheerleading the courageous deeds of anonymous activists.

If the participants in the first phase of the movement had aimed to create a political scandal, they had not succeeded yet. However, they had drawn the attention of a few hundred people who were willing to support a movement that included vandalism and other forms of sabotage. They had also established a discourse about the forest on the terms set by autonomous activists, not politicians or police.

What was missing in the first phase inversely structured the phase that followed.

Names and Addresses

By mid-June 2021, most of the grassroots left as well as autonomous, anarchist, and radical groups in Atlanta were aware of the proposed developments in the forest, but they were still searching for strategies that would enable them to build enough power and leverage to halt the projects. Some people—including activists connected to nationwide socialist organizations, abolitionist networks, and ecological advocacy groups—began knocking on doors in the vicinity of the South River Forest, reasoning that neighborhood organizations and households around the forest would be necessary allies, as they would be among those most impacted by deforestation and sound pollution. The canvassers hoped to familiarize themselves with the discourse of the neighbors and learn what might help to mobilize them.

Other strategies emerged around the same time. One group focused on the City Council meeting of June 16, which was supposed to vote on the land-lease ordinance sponsored by then-Councilperson Joyce Shepherd. Because the meeting occurred online due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the City Council members hosted their conversation from their respective residences. With a bit of research, a handful of protesters located the home address of Councilperson Shepherd. This group went to her home and displayed a banner during the meeting. While the majority of the protesters chanted from the sidewalk, one individual approached her house, knocked on the door, and rang the doorbell before returning to the street. Inside, unbeknownst to the protesters, Shepherd was panicking. Those in power typically assume that their actions occur in an abstract political "space," and that the consequences of their decisions will not directly impact them. Shepherd called off the vote and left the meeting early to call

the police, who arrived after the protesters had dispersed.

In the hour that followed, Joyce Shepherd held a press conference from the newly constructed Zone 3 Police Precinct on Metropolitan Parkway. At the precinct, Shepherd was surrounded by police officers and news media. She described in detail the aims of her land lease ordinance, the nature of the project, and the efforts of protesters to stop her. With this short statement, she catapulted the movement and its story into the mainstream. The following day, she made another statement in which she claimed that she would push through the ordinance "no matter what" the city residents that she ostensibly represented had to say. Her fellow representatives rejected the tactics of the protesters, falsely implying that their methods were illegal.

With this action, a few people were able to accomplish an early goal of the movement—to transform the Cop City/Blackhall developments from back-door agreements into public scandals. They also delayed the vote, concretely displaying the potential of direct confrontation. A new strategy was emerging: to pressure decision-makers directly.

First Week of Action

The first planned Week of Action began a few days later, on June 23. The organizers hoped to catalyze a wide array of interventions. They held meetings to explain their ideas, aiming to interconnect resistance against the Cop City development, the Blackhall development, and the accompanying gentrification and deforestation. Some set up a shared calendar and online promotion plan so that more people could step forward to express themselves in the context of the movement.

In this regard, the first week of action was a resounding success. In the course of the week, there were conversations about ecology, colonialism, and sexuality; there were guided tours by day and by moonlight; there were nightly bonfires in a forest clearing; there was a hardcore punk show at a nearby venue, during which hundreds of participants repelled police; and there was a rave party deep in the center of the forest, gathering some 500 attendees in a utopian ambience illuminated by glow sticks and lasting into the early morning hours. If the organizers had set out to generate a cultural consensus among the thousands of people in the city's DIY art, poetry, queer, punk, and underground dance subcultures, they succeeded.

On the night of June 24, people visited the home of Blackhall Studios CEO Ryan Milsap in the outer Atlanta suburb of Social Circle. Activists hoped that placing fliers at the home, street, investment properties, and post office box of Milsap would, in their words, "inspire others to research and take the fight to those directly responsible for the destruction of the forest."

Two days later, on June 26, the final day of the first week of action, fifty or more protesters marched to the headquarters of the Atlanta Police Foundation (APF). As the crowd emerged from Five Points metro station, a small contingent of officers attempted to arrest someone. The crowd engaged in hand-to-hand fighting with the police and successfully repelled them. Continuing behind a banner reading "Another Word for World is Forest," a reference to the Ursula K. Le Guin book *The Word*

The City in the Forest | Continued from Page 9

for World is Forest, the group descended on Deloitte Tower on Peachtree Street. Advancing past security, they marched straight to the APF office and smashed the glass doors and windows before overturning tables in the tower lobby. The participants successfully dispersed into the city center without arrests, while dozens of police vehicles frantically established a perimeter—effectively shutting down the central downtown corridor.

When Dissent is Not Enough

The movement expanded over the following months. New organizing groups were announced as activist organizations and independent media outlets developed a framework enabling them to orient themselves to the struggle. While corporate news and the Police Foundation failed to present a coherent media narrative following the vandalism of the APF offices, organizers got to work circulating informational fliers and online graphics, conducting interviews, knocking on doors, and organizing phone-in campaigns during subsequent City Council meetings. For nearly all of August and September, the “Stop Cop City Coalition” and others worked to introduce tension and contest the City Council process. Following the intervention at the home of Joyce Shepherd, protesters gathered outside the homes of possible “yes” voters on the nights that the vote was slated to take place, causing further delays in the process. For a moment, it seemed possible that the campaign could achieve an easy victory.

Unfortunately, it was not to be. As those who study revolutionary movements know, the police perform an essential function in class society, without which many other hierarchies and exploitative relations could not exist for long. This is not simply an economic or civic issue that can be worked around with some clever ideas and a bit of pressure. Despite the efforts of organizers, which culminated in 17 hours of oppositional public comment, the ordinance was passed on September 8 while police arrested protesters outside the home of councilperson Natalyn Archibong. The land hosting the Old Atlanta Prison Farm was turned over to the Atlanta Police Foundation.

Many sincere people were demoralized by this turn of events. Some turned their attention to the upcoming local elections, hoping that the city government could be stacked with abolitionist or progressive candidates who might strike down the project. As it turned out, Mayor Bottoms did not run for re-election, and the former mayor, Kasim Reed, lost to current mayor Andre Dickens. Joyce Shepherd also lost her campaign for re-election. Yet since the elections, nothing has changed regarding the Blackhall and APF developments.

The Fight Is On

The Atlanta Police Foundation has contracted at least three companies to build their compound. The surveying appears to be the work of Long Engineering, while the construction itself is to be done by Reeves Young Construction and Brasfield & Gorrie. It is not clear yet who will clear the land in Intrinishment Creek Park, where Blackhall Studios hopes to expand.

The information that is known to date was hard won by diligent activists on the ground. Shortly after the City Council vote in September, surveyors and small work crews began entering

the site near Key and Fayetteville Roads. The trucks and uniforms revealed the names of the contractors, which once again gave opponents of the Cop City the chance to initiate a struggle on their own terms.

On October 8, about two dozen people entered the work site from the forest and confronted contractors who appeared to be clearing land for the purposes of taking photographs and samples. When the workers left, a surveillance tower erected by the police was toppled. Forest defenders dispersed with no detentions.

Had forest defenders utilized only virtual or bureaucratic channels to collect information, they might not have learned that Reeves Young were being called in to do the actual destruction until it was publicly announced much later. The ability to break news to the public before the city government has been a consistent advantage.

Second Week of Action

It's a widely observable point of failure in movements when the protagonists lose the initiative and resort to attempting to recreate an earlier phase of events. Nostalgic for the heady days of open revolt, the chaos of fiery nights and smoke-filled shopping districts, people resolve to call together a coalition of the willing to kick things off again. Hoping it is enough to set a clear time and place, preparations are made, and a crowd assembles—but falls short of expectations, consisting chiefly of dedicated militants or friends.

As the weeks pass, this becomes the new high-water mark. With a more serious attitude, a group of friends or a network of crews calls together another demonstration “like the last one,” but perhaps in a different location or with a more ambitious intention. This may work a few times—but new roles and rules of engagement are being established, the euphoric sense of power that animated the early days is gone, and nothing can bring it back. The large crowds have dissipated and the police are learning every step of the way. Eventually, even this comes to an end, and the participants devise all kinds of theories to explain why. The conclusion typically involves finger-pointing, resentment, denunciations, and splits as the rebels blame each other for their shared failures and limitations. An entire book could be written about this phenomenon. But if participants in struggles can become aware of this general tendency, that awareness might open up space for more creative efforts.

Following the City Council defeat in September, it wasn't clear how many people would continue to oppose the developments, though the small confrontation on October 8 suggested that some wished to. Sensing the difficulty of this moment, organizers announced a second Week of Action for mid-November.

The second Week of Action was similar to the first, but there were innovations. Once again, various groups organized cultural events, information nights, bonfires, and meetings—but this time, many of these occurred in or near a more publicly advertised encampment at Intrinishment Creek Park.

The organizers of the first Week of Action had welcomed a small cluster of participants to camp, essentially in secret, on a stretch of the Old Atlanta Prison Farm. This time, a few dozen

The City in the Forest | Continued from Page 10

people pitched tents, erected tarps and make-shift kitchens, hung banners, and constructed a bona fide protest camp in the woods. This camp persisted in some form for six weeks. Unsurprisingly, the overall diversity of those who gathered had decreased compared to the first week of action, a general tendency of movements and mobilizations. When a struggle contracts as a consequence of disorientation, repression, or other setbacks, the movement oriented towards it often divides back into its constitutive elements, usually along ethnic, generational, gender, and class stratifications, despite the efforts and good will of the participants.

Taking the Fight to Them

Now that Reeves Young had been identified as the contractor hired to destroy the forest and build the police training compound, many participants in the movement shifted to focusing on them. On November 12, 2021, immediately after the second Week of Action, thirty people descended on their offices in Sugar Hill, Georgia, forty miles outside of Atlanta. Holding banners and chanting slogans, this group walked right into the offices, disrupting a board meeting involving company president Dean Reeves and CEO Eric Young. The executives did their best to appear unfazed, commenting on the millions they would line their pockets with. Slowly, the atrium filled with workers concerned about the protests and the aggression and violence of their bosses, who had begun shoving and even punching protesters, going out of their way to target the smallest people present. The protesters had already accomplished their goal of applying direct confrontational pressure to the Atlanta Police Foundations service provider.

Three days later, two more excavators were burned on the parcel of land currently owned by Blackhall studios. These were the eleventh and twelfth pieces of heavy machinery to be sabotaged, reckoning by the claims of responsibility that appeared online. Unlike the previous anonymous statements, the statement accompanying this action was succinct, stating only what had occurred and why.

The movement had faced setbacks, but it had not collapsed into a private grudge match between hardened militants and the Police Foundation.

Stomp Dance

On November 27, 2021, 250-300 people gathered in Intrenchment Creek Park to observe and participate in a ceremonial stomp dance and service of the Muscogee (Creek) people. This particular delegation came from the Helvpe Ceremonial Grounds in eastern Oklahoma, invited to their ancestral homelands by a local indigenous organizer.

The Muscogee people were once organized into a confederation of tribes spanning much of what is now Alabama, Georgia, Florida, and South Carolina. The Muscogee peoples and their Mississippian ancestors in this region, known as “mound builders,” maintained a network of towns, each preserving political autonomy and territorial independence, allocating resources and making decisions in a consensus process unknown to their later European antagonists. The concept of private property that reigns supreme in our society was anathema to the Muscogee peoples, who held essential goods and lands communally. Nearly all of what

is now Alabama was taken from the Muscogee in 1814, following the defeat of the Red Sticks revolt in which many Muscogee people allied with Tecumseh and the insurgent Shawnee peoples against colonial expansion into their communities. Between 1821 and 1836, the Muscogee were forcibly removed from their homes to Oklahoma, where many still live.

When the November 27 delegation came to the South River Forest, or Weelaunee, to perform their dances and speak their language, they shared some of their knowledge and histories with those gathered. But their goal was not simply to share culture in a depoliticized way. They encouraged the current residents of Atlanta to stop the destruction of the forest and halt the Cop City and Blackhall developments, understanding these as the latest chapters in a long story of destruction beginning with the European colonization.

Moves and Counter-Moves

In the weeks following the ceremony at Intrenchment Creek Park, participants in the encampment in the forest outfitted it with a field kitchen and sitting area and erected banners and signs in the forest visible to mountain bikers, hikers, and others who passed through the park. Establishing a semi-permanent presence in the forest was a way to gather information on an ongoing basis and to provide an immediate deterrent to developers.

The encampment was evicted on December 17, after six weeks. That morning, about a dozen people blocked the entrance to the existing Blackhall Studios site, located on Constitution Road. This contingent subsequently burned a flag, chanted slogans, and “hexed” the media company before dispersing into the forest. In the following hours, presumably at the urging of Blackhall, Dekalb County Police entered the forest en masse, mobilizing police cruisers in the parking lot, officers on foot, helicopters and drones overhead, and unmarked vehicles on the streets. The officers were likely intimidated by the low-visibility terrain; in any event, all of the forest defenders based in the encampment escaped without being detained. This was the first time a concerted effort was made by law enforcement to engage protesters in the South River Forest.

A month later, on January 18, 2022, Reeves Young and the Atlanta Police Foundation entered the forest near Key Road with a bulldozer. They began knocking down trees so that their associates in Long Engineering could survey the land, placing stakes and marking trees for removal. Approximately a dozen people in dark clothing approached the workers and APF representative Alan Williams, ordering them to leave. The bulldozer was subsequently vandalized.

Several people quickly built multiple impressive tree houses near the surveying site and climbed into them. News of this new tactic spread rapidly. It couldn’t have come at a better time.

The Stakes Go Up

In the confrontations with contractors on October 8 and January 18, small, dedicated groups were able to halt work without resorting to force. It is possible that this period has ended, or else that the timeline for surveying and sample boring now requires business executives and police chiefs to expose their employees to greater risks in pursuit of their respective bottom lines.

The City in the Forest | Continued from Page 11

From January 25-28, repeated efforts were made to stop tree felling and soil boring, all to no avail. In some instances, only a handful of activists were on the scene behind makeshift barricades. Reinforcements could not arrive rapidly enough to assist those on the ground. Later in the week, on January 28, around 60 people marched to defend the forest at 10 am on a weekday. This crowd, the largest to gather in any one place in many months, marched into the forest, onto the Prison Farm property, around erected barricades and tree houses, and directly confronted construction workers who were boring holes in the ground.

Police attacked the march, tackling several people; the other demonstrators did not mount a proportional response to this aggression, despite outnumbering the police. Perhaps some of the tactics popular during the 2020 rebellion, such as mass use of umbrellas or makeshift shields, could have equipped the participants to feel more capable of decisive action. Alan Williams of the Atlanta Police Foundation was filming protesters, looking a little anxious as he did so.

This was the first time that protesters were arrested in the South River Forest, on either the Prison Farm or Intrenchment Creek sides. Each new phase of the movement has been constructed out of elements missing from the phases that preceded it, developing out of the contradictions and limits of the previous phase. It may be possible to chart a new path forward from this point starting from the most resilient aspects of the previous stages.

The Best Defense is a Good Offense

Every movement needs both offensive and defensive strategies. In this case, defensive strategies would enable activists to withstand repression and protect the forest. Offensive strategies would enable activists to impose their own timelines, battlegrounds, and confrontations, demoralizing those who seek to destroy the forest and eventually forcing them to abandon the planned developments.

Defense

As of the beginning of April, it appears that on-the-ground resistance to construction is not currently a viable offensive strategy. The presence of activists and organized groups in the South River Forest should be understood as the most sophisticated defensive strategy available to the movement. The forest will remain a site of contestation as long as the APF and Blackhall Studios seek to destroy it. The more activists understand the forest and its specific terrain, the more prepared groups will be to carry out actions there; the more practices and infrastructures participants establish that newcomers can make use of, the better. By continuously connecting a struggle to the fate of a particular place, participants foster an emotional and sensuous relation to the land that is seldom found in movements around abstract goals. Some components of a coherent and efficient defense:

- **Hold decisive terrain.** Reeves Young and Blackhall hope to destroy a particular area of forest. By preventing them from easily operating in this location, making it difficult to survey it and dangerous to leave equipment there, a defense strategy can severely limit their ability to accomplish this.

- **Attrition.** Recognizing this terrain as the defensive position, forest defenders could drag Reeves Young, local police, or other adversarial forces into narrowly focused and labor-intensive conflicts, games of “cat and mouse,” and other expensive and unrewarding engagements. For now, the defenders possess an advantage in this regard, because the terrain itself can be prepared to frustrate the efforts, ease of movement, visibility, or general operating capacity of the attacker. The more the adversary has to surveil and plan around the defenders, the less they can focus on destroying the forest.
- **Disruption:** Forest defenders can limit the ability of the adversary to attack according to coherent or synchronized schedules or timelines. Defenders have the privilege of selective engagement—they can engage when and how they please, according to inclination or opportunity, putting the attackers in a state of uncertainty.
- **Preparation.** The primary purpose of defense is to open space for offense. Forest defenders can carry out stationary or mobile operations; they can engage or escape; they can disrupt, sabotage, confuse, or misdirect the developers. The chief goal is to force the developers to proceed in a clumsy and confused manner both logistically and politically.

Defense cannot substitute for offense, but it is a necessary aspect of all fights. If on-the-ground defense becomes the sole focus of a movement, that movement will eventually be defeated. In this case, that would mark a step back from the beginning of the movement, in which the participants set the terms of the entire conversation. If large-scale development does not begin for many months, it could be disastrous for embattled activists to spend that period accumulating charges and injuries fighting uphill battles against an increasingly emboldened and militarized opponent.

Therefore, other means are necessary.

Offense

Whoever sets the terms of a fight can arrange the dynamics to the disadvantage of their adversary. When police drive hostile crowds into empty corridors, parking garages, or alleys, that is what they are trying to achieve. This is what governments do by continuously framing conflicts as discrete “issues” and “debates,” conferring agency to those best situated for generating public consensus and structuring the consumption of information (i.e., politicians and the electoral machinery that promotes them). For those with less means, the best strategies catch their opponents off guard, compelling the adversary to respond in ineffective or imprecise ways. Ideally, the adversary should not even understand what is happening.



The City in the Forest | Continued from Page 12

Participants in direct-action-oriented movements generally have an overdeveloped focus on offense. Gathering information, audacious frontal engagements, surprise attacks, swarming tactics, hit-and-run maneuvers, striking unprotected targets or infrastructure, targeted online campaigns, setting the pace with both concentrated groups and decentralized crowds... all of these are more or less familiar to those experienced in riots, rebellions, and direct action campaigns over the last decade.

Yet there is more to say about the principles of offense and how they relate to this movement.

Movement Diversity Is an Asset

To date, the movement to defend the Atlanta forest has not coalesced around a single coherent strategy. The participants have employed several parallel strategies in tandem, with the strengths of one approach filling in for the weaknesses of another. This works best when the participants tolerate those with different tactics and priorities. In a movement that accommodates a diverse range of approaches, particular strategies can succumb to “evolutionary pressures” without that jeopardizing the movement as a whole.

As alluded to earlier, there have been tensions in the movement regarding the priorities of different groups, the presumed identities of the participants, and the alleged connections between their respective experiences of oppression and their political ideologies. At times—and this is hardly unique to this movement—single-issue mentalities have undermined some participants’ ability to imagine a struggle cohering around overlapping but distinct aims and motivations; at worst, this has led some to claim that those with different priorities are not worth collaborating with. Many movements have been hamstrung by this kind of mentality over the past half decade—and police departments, city governments, reactionaries, and liberal opportunists have not missed the chance to exploit this. Both experience and common sense suggest that it is not wise to place all of one’s eggs in one basket—and that redundancy is not always a sign of disorganization, as some centralizing tendencies imply, but can be an expression of a more resilient approach to organization, as long as the general goals remain in focus.

Critical, inquisitive attitudes will generally serve us better than any form of dogmatism. If one group or tendency can accomplish their goals alone, then let them do so. Since none has, yet, in this case, it must be necessary to work alongside others, even if one would prefer not to. If one can only work with those one can bully, intimidate, or shame, it should not be surprising if one’s allies lack conviction, courage, and intelligence. The clear articulation of differences, criticisms, and concerns is a strength in movements, but ideally, they should be articulated in a spirit of mutual education and learning, lest they become a part of the repressive landscape itself, serving police and developers as various tendencies and cliques slowly cannibalize each another.

The Shock of Victory

We win more than we realize. Across twenty years of resistance, expressed in direct action movements on both “local” and “global” scales, attitudes have shifted throughout our society.

The efforts and ideas of social movements have been instrumental in this transformation. We have seen the results in widespread approval of Indigenous and environmentalist resistance to the Dakota Access Pipeline in 2016, in the unprecedented participation of white and non-Black youth alongside Black rebels in the George Floyd Uprising of 2020, and in the general consensus, across an entire cross section of political tendencies, that the neoliberal order that existed from 1980 on is in crisis and that a new chapter in world politics is desirable as well as inevitable.

In many environmental defense movements, it is very difficult to accomplish the short-term goals; the protagonists often proceed as if they do not expect to win. The mid-range goals, though rarely articulated aloud, typically include more general aims such as:

- discourage future ecologically destructive ventures
- de-legitimize authoritarian organizing strategies
- demoralize or challenge the legitimacy of police forces and institutional channels
- innovate or spread direct-action-oriented frameworks or tactics
- spread radical ideas and extend the networks of those who espouse them.

When we consider the past decade through this lens, it is hard to argue that anarchists, abolitionists, anti-fascists, environmentalists, feminists, prison organizers, and Indigenous and Black radicals have failed. Some of these goals have been achieved to such an extent that tactics and proposals that were confined to the radical fringe 20 years ago have been adopted by millions.

Long-term goals—world revolution, decolonization, the abolition of capitalism, the destruction of borders and racial hierarchies, the abolition of police and standing armies, the advent of real community—do not seem immediately attainable, but they too may be closer. Since 2018, according to the International Monetary Fund, the tides of revolution, insurrection, upheaval, and mass disobedience have reached historic proportions. Thus far, most of these rebellions have been suppressed or appeased, confirming the classical revolutionary doctrine that only a worldwide revolution can truly emancipate us, as the ruling order now commands forces of repression with global reach. Nonetheless, as we are seeing in Ukraine right now, there are limits to what even the most powerful of those armies can do.

But what about those of us engaged in concrete struggles today, struggles we are determined to win? Paradoxically, it appears that nowadays, it is easier to achieve mid-range goals than short-term goals, and people focus on long-term goals more often than short-term ones. Somehow, thousands have participated in destroying shopping districts, establishing temporary cop-free zones, and blockading airports, but it is still very difficult to imagine protecting a single wildlife corridor at the outer limits of one city. This is unnerving, but it should not be demoralizing. As we have already seen, it is more likely that thousands of people will rip up paving stones and use them to fight the police than it is that the Atlanta City Council will heed the demands of its own constituents. It was precisely this dramatic sequence of events, spiraling outward from the ruins

The City in the Forest | Continued from Page 13

of the Third Precinct in a storm of riots, that made it possible to talk about restructuring law enforcement across the country—not the reformist organizing campaigns of the preceding decades.

In light of this, those dedicated to defending the Atlanta forest find themselves in a difficult predicament, though not an impossible one. On the one hand, they must develop a framework that distributes agency broadly—something that many groups can participate in and influence. The aims of these groups must be immediate enough that small victories can enable people to build confidence and momentum. And they must proceed as if victory is possible—for surely, it is—while bearing in mind that another revolt against the police, gentrification, climate collapse, or racism could erupt everywhere, informed by experience emerging from a struggle that is, for the time being, a local affair.

This is an immense responsibility—and a gift. The influence of intentional groups and organizations can get lost in the chaos of massive uprisings, as millions take hold of their own lives. Yet in the past decade, we can see how the innovations of radicals and small groups in local movements can shape the imaginations of the mass movements that follow. The defense of the Atlanta forest will influence struggles to come. What we do now will set a precedent for what happens later. Let's not back down.

No Cop City, No Hollywood Dystopia!

Abortion and Abolition (News about Actions by Jane's Revenge in Response to the Overturning of Roe v. Wade)

Abortion is an abolitionist issue. In the most concrete terms, the Supreme Court's decision in the case of Dobbs v. Jackson was officially released on June 24, though a draft of the opinion was leaked to the media on May 6. The Court's overturning of Roe v. Wade has opened the door to the criminalization and incarceration of both those who seek abortion care and those who offer it. Beyond this, limiting abortion access is also an expansion of the state's control over our bodies. The same apparatus that puts people in cages, surveils their locations with ankle monitors, and regulates their movements with borders, now also acts as an authority over what happens to us if we become pregnant. And it will also have devastating effects on all people who become pregnant while incarcerated. The following communiques come from a decentralized and anonymous network calling itself "Jane's Revenge" that is fighting back against this attack on bodily autonomy through direct actions targeting sites of anti-abortion infrastructure. We've copied them from the website janesrevenge.noblogs.org that collects statements from associated actions, and have redacted some of the spicier stuff... —The Opening Statement

May 8: "First Communiqué"

This is not a declaration of war. War has been upon us for decades. A war which we did not want, and did not provoke. Too long have we been attacked for asking for basic medical care. Too long have we been shot, bombed, and forced into childbirth without consent.

This was only a warning. We demand the disbanding of all anti-choice establishments, fake clinics, and violent anti-choice groups within the next thirty days. This is not a mere "difference of opinion" as some have framed it. We are literally fighting for our lives. We will not sit still while we are killed and forced into servitude. We have run thin on patience and mercy for those who seek to strip us of what little autonomy we have left. As you continue to bomb clinics and assassinate doctors with impunity,

[REDACTED].

We are forced to adopt the minimum military requirement for a political struggle. Again, this was only a warning. Next time the infrastructure of the enslavers will not survive. Medical imperialism will not face a passive enemy. Wisconsin is the first flashpoint, but we are all over the US, and we will issue no further warnings.

And we will not stop, we will not back down, nor will we hesitate to strike until the inalienable right to manage our own health is returned to us.

We are not one group, but many. We are in your city. We are in every city.

Your repression only strengthens our accomplice-ship and resolve.

—Jane's Revenge



Abortion and Abolition | Continued from page 14

May 30: “Night of Rage”

[REDACTED]

Last week, an evil creature slaughtered 19 children and two teachers in their classroom in Texas. While some may call this horrific act “senseless” or “random,” we know that’s not the case. We know that this was an act of male domination and patriarchal violence, meant to make women, children and teachers live in fear. We know it is deeply connected to the reproductive violence about to be unleashed on this land by an illegitimate institution founded in white male supremacy.

[REDACTED]

Consider this your call to action.

On the night the final ruling is issued—a specific date we cannot yet predict, but we know is arriving imminently—we are asking for courageous hearts to come out after dark.

Whoever you are and wherever you are, we are asking for you to do what you can to make your anger known.

We have selected a time of 8pm for actions nationwide to begin, but know that this is a general guideline. There may be other considerations involved in planning time and place. We do not claim to speak for every community or crew. We are simply calling out to you. And we hope you answer our cries.

To the cis male allies who would be interested in joining us in the streets, we say: you are certainly welcome, but you must use your privilege to shield and support us in a way that also enables us to get angry. Do not police us. Do not tell us what is and isn’t appropriate. But do aid us when we are in need.

[REDACTED]

We would not be issuing this call if we did not believe in our bones that this kind of action *is* possible. We have witnessed the wom*n of Argentina, Mexico and Poland organize autonomously for their reproductive liberation. We know it can be done...but we need every soul reading this to do their part.

To those who work to oppress us: If abortion isn’t safe, you aren’t either. We are everywhere.

Signed,

JANE’S REVENGE

June 15: “Another
Communiqué”

You have seen that we are real, and that we are not merely pushing empty words. As we said: we are not one group but many. You have seen us in Madison WI, Ft. Collins CO, Reisertown MA, Olympia WA, Des Moines IA, Lynwood WA, Washington DC, Ashville NC, Buffalo NY, Hollywood FL, Vancouver WA, Frederick MA, Denton TX, Gresham OR, Eugene OR, Portland OR, among others, and we work in countless locations invisibly. You’ve read the communiqués from the various cells, you’ve seen the proliferating messages in graffiti and elsewhere, and you know that we are serious.

We were unsurprised to see thirty days come and thirty days pass with no sign of concilience or even bare-minimum self-reflection from you who impersonate healthcare providers in order to harm the vulnerable. History may not repeat itself, but it certainly rhymes, and we’ve already seen such stanzas where medical autonomy is stripped away, humanity is increasingly criminalized, and merely surviving becomes largely untenable.

Your thirty days expired yesterday. We offered an honorable way out. You could have walked away. Now the leash is off. And we will make it as hard as possible for your campaign of oppression to continue. We have demonstrated in the past month how easy and fun it is to attack. We are versatile, we are mercurial, and we answer to no one but ourselves. We promised to take increasingly drastic measures against oppressive infrastructures. Rest assured that we will, and those measures may not come in the form of something so easily cleaned up as fire and graffiti. Sometimes you will see what we do, and you will know that it is us. Sometimes you will think you merely are unlucky, because you cannot see the ways which we interfere in your affairs. But your pointless attempts to control others, and make life more difficult, will not be met passively. Eventually your insurance companies, and your financial backers will realize you are a bad investment.

From here forward, any anti-choice group who closes their doors, and stops operating will no longer be a target. But until you do, it’s open season, and we know where your operations are. The

infrastructure of the enslavers will not survive. We will never stop, back down, slow down, or retreat. We did not want this; but it is upon us, and so we must deal with it proportionally. We exist in confluence and solidarity with all others in the struggle for complete liberation. Our recourse now is to defend ourselves and to build robust, caring communities of mutual aid, so that we may heal ourselves without the need of the medical industry or any other intermediary. Through attacking, [REDACTED]...Go forth and manifest the things you wish to see. Stay safe, and practice your cursive.

—Jane’s Revenge

June 21: “Fake Clinic
Attacked – Detroit, MI”

On the night of 6/19 a gang of criminal queers smashed the windows of two fake abortion clinics in the greater Detroit area leaving the messages “if abortion isn’t safe, neither are you” and “fake clinic.”

Jane will have her revenge.

June 26: “Night of Rage
Communiqué”

The night of June 24 was the Night of Rage. We decided to attack a crisis pregnancy center in Glendale, California with spray paint. The phrases written were “Jane was here,” “abort the court,” and “If abortions aren’t safe neither are you.” All across the country people protested and revolted against this attack on bodily autonomy.

As we predicted almost a month ago, the United States Supreme Court stripped millions of people of bodily autonomy and access to abortion. This is only the beginning of the attacks on autonomy in store from the courts and fascists. Up next on the chopping block is access to contraception, the legality of everyday queer life, and gay marriage. But this is part of a broader pattern of fascism within the United States.

To all the conservatives, Fox News anchors, judges, cops, Christian extremists, or federal agents reading this:

[REDACTED] Some spray paint will be the least of your worries. [REDACTED]...

Expect us, Jane’s Revenge

Abortion and Abolition | Continued from page 15

June 27: “Communiqué from Jane’s Revenge – Burlington, VT”

Following the Supremacist Court’s laughable attempt at control over millions of bodies with the arbitrary and retroactive overturning of its own decision on Roe v. Wade, in addition to further threats against the queer community made by a certain Supreme Pig, a few of us up here in so-called “Burlington, Vermont” (colonized Abenaki land) decided it was a good time to remind the tyrants that we are everywhere and that we will not be fucked with.

It came to our attention months ago that there’s an anti-abortion clinic here in town masquerading as a safe place for pregnant folks to receive care and resources. Their tactic is to lure in vulnerable people with emotionally manipulative messaging about “non-judgmental support” before pulling the ol’ bait and switch and doing everything they can to guilt people into carrying their unplanned pregnancies to term. The impact of concrete chunks on those old colonial window frames was absolutely titillating... We struck once, disappearing into the dark before re-emerging from another direction and striking again. A veritable volley of crashing and shattering sounds filled the neighborhood and our gay hearts to their brims.

The tired, self-congratulatory, hippie liberalism in this city is a large part of what allows organizations like this to remain in our community and to do harm to vulnerable people.

We say: fuck that. No more.

A couple of months back, our sister Fern was stabbed to death by some transphobic asshat. Then, just weeks later, they tried to intimidate us further by smashing up our Pride Center. Still, the burnout Phish Heads did nothing. Circle jerk vigils where cis-het white hippies sound-off on their megaphones in the park like it’s 1969 are obviously doing nothing with actual consequence. Spare us the performance. It’s time to put up a real fight. [REDACTED] be feral with joy! [REDACTED].

Peaceful protest is dead and so is Jerry Garcia!

Jane’s Revenge lives!

Issue 15 | The Opening Statement | Page 16

June 27: “Anti-Abortion Pregnancy Center Torched – Longmont, CO”

An anti-abortion “crisis pregnancy center” in Longmont, CO was set on fire and tagged with a circle-A and the message “if abortions aren’t safe neither are you” on Saturday.

The building sustained fire and heavy smoke damage.

Another message spray painted on the front entryway to the Life Choices says: “BANS OFF OUR BODIES.”

Militants are escalating their attacks on anti-abortion clinics since Friday’s Supreme Court decision to overturn the landmark federal law that allows abortions, Roe v. Wade.

June 29: “Attack on Anti-Abortion Center – Everett, WA”

On the night of June 27 a local Jane’s Revenge cell visited our neighborhood PRC (patriarchal rapist collaborators/pregnancy resource center) in Everett WA and had a [REDACTED] with their [REDACTED] and a [REDACTED].

We echo what you have heard from JR before – in acting, we learn to act, and in waiting, we learn only to wait. Acting is fun and easy. You only need a few very trusted comrades. Those who would kill us are vulnerable and visible. We’ve only just begun.

In revolutionary joy, Jane’s Revenge



June 30: “Fake Pregnancy Center Smashed – Lynchburg, VA”

On June 24th, the night after the Supreme Court overturned Roe v. Wade, Jane’s Revenge smashed the windows of the Blue Ridge Pregnancy Center’s headquarters in so-called Lynchburg Virginia. Lynchburg is a hotbed of Christian fascism, home to the Neo-Nazi Wolves of Vinland group and Jerry Falwell’s “Liberty” university. We smashed out their windows, and vandalized their building with slogans and imagery ranging from coat hangers to “vote blue lol.” The ground in front of their now smashed front door reads “if abortion ain’t safe you ain’t safe.”

[REDACTED] We have learned that this is really quite simple, all you need is a few trusted friends and a little bit of passion! Fascism is on the rise but so are we!

[REDACTED] dry your tears.

—Jane’s Revenge #187

July 3: “Another Fake Clinic Attacked – Southfield, MI”

On the morning of 6/29/22, the many fragile windows of “Mother and Unborn Baby Care” in Southfield Michigan were smashed. The work was signed “Jane’s Revenge” and “If abortions aren’t safe, neither are you.”

July 8: “Two Fake Clinics Attacked – Worcester, MA”

Two fake clinics in Worcester, Massachusetts (Problem Pregnancy and Clearway Clinic) have been attacked. The assholes who lie to vulnerable pregnant people about abortion to confuse them and convince them to not seek abortions discovered this morning that their buildings had been redecorated with paint and broken glass. As others have said, [REDACTED]. To any purveyors of patriarchy that might be reading this, fuck off, or [REDACTED].

Joyfully yours, Jane

Truth And Justice For Álvaro Sebastián Ramírez

Statement from the Network Against Repression and For Solidarity in memory of the Indigenous Zapotec community organizer and ex-political prisoner, Álvaro Sebastián Ramírez, who was assassinated on July 19, 2022 in Xorocotlán, Oaxaca following decades of political persecution against him.

Álvaro Sebastián Ramírez was born in the Sierra Sur region of Oaxaca on February 19, 1958. Originally from San Agustín Loxicha, he was a campesino, teacher, director of education, father, and tireless fighter for his people.

A teacher by profession, one of his first organized actions was fighting for drinking water for the community of Jazmín del Potrero, where he taught classes. His struggle against local political bosses and gunmen in his town materialized in the founding of the Organización de los Pueblos Indígenas Zapotecos (OPIZ) in 1984.

His struggle led him to confront local, state, and national power groups. In 1997, the state of Oaxaca was governed by Diódoro Carrasco Altamirano, known for his repressive profile with detentions, disappearances, extrajudicial executions, and cases of torture, particularly in the Loxicha region.

On December 15, 1997, Álvaro Sebastián Ramírez was kidnapped by state repressive forces in the city of Oaxaca, accused of participating in an action of the guerrilla group EPR against elements of the Marines, Preventive and Municipal Police, on August 28, 1996 in Crucecita, Huatulco. Álvaro was disappeared and tortured in order to force him to plead guilty before being imprisoned together with 152 Indigenous Zapotecs of Loxicha. He was unjustly accused of the crimes of conspiracy, terrorism, aggravated and attempted homicide.

During 20 years of unjust imprisonment, family members of Álvaro Sebastián Ramírez carried out campaigns, mobilizations, and events denouncing his imprisonment and struggling for freedom and justice. Different collectives, organizations, and individuals of Mexico and the world joined the initiatives, always encouraged by the tenacity and organizing work Álvaro Sebastián Ramírez carried out from inside prison. Together with political prisoners of Chiapas and Guerrero, they organized hunger strikes, mobilizations, and denunciations, resulting in the freedom of dozens of compañeros and compañeras.

In 2006, Álvaro joined the Other Campaign of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation adhering to the Sixth Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle. In every opportunity from his place of struggle inside prison, Álvaro demonstrated his solidarity with the dignified struggles of the peoples of Mexico and the world. His voice always accompanied the disappeared, other political prisoners, and the politically persecuted, pointing out and denouncing the aggressions against the Zapatista communities, demanding the return of the Normalistas of Ayotzinapa, struggling for truth and justice.

In 2007, La Voz de los Zapotecos Xiches en Prisión was born, an organization adherent to the Sixth Declaration of the Lacandon Jungle and member of the Network Against Repression and For Solidarity.



In 2013, the struggle for the freedom of Álvaro Sebastián Ramírez was embraced by the National Indigenous Congress, joining efforts, hands, and hearts for justice and dignity.

Through La Voz de los Xiches, Álvaro ruptured the prison walls and bars in Mexico and the world. His voice was heard in the valleys, towns, and communities of Oaxaca, in the Zócalo of Mexico City, in dignified Chiapas, at the base of the Xinantécatl volcano, in the Nahua community of San Pedro Tlanixco. He was portrayed in murals in the valley of Chalko; he exchanged words and thoughts with the compañero Mumia Abu-Jamal in the United States; he was heard in radio programs in Guerrero, Queretaro, and North Carolina. Solidarity emerged in collective spaces of women who struggle, of punk groups, of anarchist, student, teachers, union, Indigenous, and campesino organizations. Solidarity crossed borders and one could feel the fraternal and combative embrace of Latin American, European, and US internationalism.

The fruits of the struggle for freedom and justice came to bloom in 2017, when Álvaro left prison thanks to decades of organization and mobilization.

With his community and in the city, Álvaro continued his civil and peaceful struggle, putting grassroots organizational work above the search for positions of electoral power. He denounced the corruption and cynicism of the groups of power who have always held the apparatus of the state, but with another name, beneath different initials, but acting with the same impunity for more than a century.

For us, the Network Against Repression and For Solidarity, it is impossible to separate the pathway of struggle and organizational work of the compañero Álvaro Sebastián Ramírez, from his devious, cowardly, and despicable assassination. Coincidences do not exist. A few days ago, Álvaro accused local politicians of embezzlement, and yesterday July 19 he was assassinated. Since he had returned to his community, Álvaro was persecuted, and more than once assassination attempts were made against his life. Like Álvaro, many who have won their freedom from prison have been assassinated.

Truth And Justice For Álvaro Sebastián Ramírez | continued from page 17

With this assassination, the paid media has given free reign to morbidity and disinformation, publishing photos showing the little ethic that characterizes the mercenaries who own the money and the editorial desks, publishing articles that lack legitimacy about the political intentions of the compañero Álvaro Sebastián Ramírez. Nothing more false and despicable than trying to distort a struggle that was organized from below, insinuating the implausible, that our compañero was seeking positions of power.

From the Network Against Repression and For Solidarity, we will struggle for truth and justice for our compañero Álvaro Sebastián Ramírez. Nothing will come from above but sterile and empty statements. Today more than ever, Mexican bureaucracy is a guarantor of impunity and cowardice.

Our solidarity, love, pain, and rage are with the Sebastián Luis family, especially our compañera Erika. For her, we send a fraternal and collective embrace.

We will remember the compañero Álvaro smiling next to his people, with his family, convinced that education and organization are fundamental to transform the roots of this system of death. His struggle for life will always be an example for us.

Farewell compañero Álvaro, may the earth embrace you, just as you taught us to defend her, and may freedom reach you wherever you are.

Truth and Justice for Álvaro Sebastián Ramírez!

Against Dispossession and Repression: Solidarity!

The Network Against Repression and For Solidarity
(RvsR)

MAILED AUGUST 6, 2022

THE OPENING STATEMENT is an abolitionist newsletter driven by the voices and visions of Michigan prisoners, as well as those on the outside impacted by the prison system. *THE OPENING STATEMENT* hopes to foster ongoing discussion against the violence of incarceration.

IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO SUBSCRIBE, please write to the address below requesting a subscription and you will begin receiving the publication free of charge. Current publication is quarterly.

FAMILY AND FRIENDS can find us at
www.michiganabolition.org

HELP SPREAD THE WORD!

Do you know someone who might be interested in this publication? Please share it with them and have them write to us directly. We are not able to add someone to our subscription list without hearing from them directly.

IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO UNSUBSCRIBE, please let us know and we will remove your name immediately. We understand that people may choose to unsubscribe for any number of legitimate reasons and respect that choice, no questions asked!

CONTACT:

The Opening Statement
c/o MAPS
PO Box 8011
Ann Arbor, MI 48107

